



Family Court Project

PORTER COUNTY FAMILY COURT

Basic Information

Population:	162,181
County Seat:	Valparaiso
Judicial Officers:	Nine
Date of Project Implementation:	February 2000
Project Judge/s:	Hon. Mary R. Harper
Administrative Contact:	Alison M. Cox
Project Funding:	County General Fund

Family Court Mission Statement

Please provide a mission statement for your Family Court Programming

The Porter County Family Court will provide case management services and coordinate delivery of human services for families and household members who have cases throughout the judicial system. This approach will bridge the current gap between the fields of adult and juvenile justice. Service providers in the fields of family law, child welfare, education and mental health will be utilized. The comprehensive approach will gather and collect information on families appearing in front of the court under pertinent family law and juvenile cases. This "full service court" process will be coordinated in order to promote judicial consistency and to best serve the needs of Porter County's families and children.

Indiana Supreme Court
Division of State Court Administration
30 South Meridian Street, Suite 500
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Family Court Programming

Please provide a description your Family Court Programming

Porter County uses the *information sharing between multiple courts* model, generally referred to as *case tracking* or *one family-one case manager*. The family court supervisor identifies eligible families from reviewing a variety of information sources, including attorney appearance forms forwarded from the clerk, domestic violence reports and child abuse and neglect reports. The supervisor also receives referral forms or informal requests from judges, court staff, CASAs, attorneys and others.

Any family with multiple cases pending in the court system is eligible for the family court. When a family is selected for family court all of the family's pending litigation is included in the family court proceeding, including criminal matters significant to the family. An order is issued assigning the cases to family court, but the cases all remain in their original courts.

The family court case manager prepares a written "case management" report that provides basic information about the pending multiple litigation for all the judges, attorneys, parties, and appropriate government agencies or service providers involved with the family. The case management report advises the courts and all appropriate persons of the legal issues impacting the family, ensures more informed decision making regarding safety and stability issues for the children, and helps coordinate needed services for families. The information sharing between all the courts and parties avoids conflicting hearing dates and inconsistent court orders for family members.

Porter County has also developed subsidized facilitation services in divorce custody and visitation cases, and a "paternity clinic" that uses trained Family Court staff to provide facilitation services in paternity custody cases. Porter County filed and received approval for their ADR Plan to increase filing fees to subsidize mediation services to low income parties in divorce and paternity cases.

The Porter County family court also provides a variety of special services for at-risk and high-risk families. The pre-existing "Project ATTEND" program was brought under the family court umbrella in 2003. This programming provides specialized services to the families of children with truancy and other school problems. A Special Services Case Manager focuses truancy diversion programming to both parents and identified children. Programming includes school-based supervision, case

conferencing, and home-based visitation, as necessary.

The 2003 reorganization of the family court project within the juvenile probation department created an innovative approach to service delivery for the Porter County courts. Since the reorganization, the Family Court has implemented Mental Health Diversion programming and a Juvenile & Family Drug Court. These programs are enhancements to the already growing continuum of care that the Family Court provides to Porter County.

Mental Health Diversion programming started in 2005. The diversion program allows for screening to occur within all juvenile delinquency referrals and provide further mental health assessment to be completed prior to recommendation as to disposition of a juvenile matter. Cases referred can be diverted from Juvenile Court involvement or engage in Court processes with specialized system of care programming implemented.

In September 2008, the Family Court initiated a Juvenile & Family Drug Court. The Court allows for specialized services to be implemented with juveniles who have been identified with having substance dependence. Participants work through a five phase level system while participating in substance abuse counseling, groups, and pro-social activities. Juveniles also have regular contact with a judge. If identified, parents of juvenile participants will engage in substance abuse programming. The program received its initial three year certification from the Indiana Judicial Center in 2009 and re-certification in 2012.

Number of Families Served

Please provide an estimate of the number of families served through the Family Court Programming

Since the Court's inception, it has served an average of 140 families per year in our case tracking program; an average of 200 families per year in our Project Attend program; an average of 25 youth per year in our Mental Health Diversion program; an average of 10 families per year in our Juvenile & Family Drug Court; and an average of 70 families per year in our facilitation programs.